

Public Opinion and Lessons from the Survey on Information Openness of Nuclear Safety

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1. Introduction

The demand of the general public on nuclear safety and safety information is in peak area since commercial nuclear energy has been introduced in Korea. We are trying to develop the basic strategy for enhancement of the public confidence via proactive information openness on nuclear safety. In order to understand the needs about the information disclosure of the local residents around nuclear power plants, we interviewed some inhabitants and performed public opinion poll, and then tried to review the survey results from the viewpoints of information audience.

2. Survey Results and Lessons

In this section the survey results of personal interview and public opinion poll for local inhabitants around nuclear power plants are described. The personal interviews, prior to the public poll, were performed in order to find the preliminary needs of local inhabitants and to conduct in-depth discussion.

2.1 Interviews with the Representative Local Inhabitants

We interviewed the 12 local activists and residents of each area of nuclear power plant, who had influence on public opinion. The personal interview was performed between June and July of 2002 and the interview location was chosen by each interviewer. During the interviews, we used non-structured questionnaire and the topics were the experiences and impression of information disclosure [1].

Every interviewer pointed out the superficial openness about safety information of nuclear power plant and believed that the information disclosure act is not a good tool irrespective of their experience on that act, because of the delivery delay and fragmented information openness. The interviewers preferred the third party information source (e.g., member of National Assembly) to official information provider (e.g., operating licensee of nuclear power plant, nuclear regulatory body). They also expressed that they devaluated the information of official information provider because the contents of information did not meet the curiosities and anxieties of local inhabitants and the characteristic of information was unilateral, in that the information was just list of terminologies and did not consider information audience. They even thought that the regulatory body was already captured by the electric utility.

2.2 Public Poll on Local Inhabitants

The public opinion poll of local residents around nuclear power plants were performed twice at December of 2002 [2] and January-February of 2004 [3]. For the objective public poll, Gallup Korea carried out the respondent sampling, interviewer selection and training, personal interview, data collection and processing. The effective sample size of public poll was 400 persons at first poll, 800 persons at second poll and divided evenly by four sites of nuclear power. The margin of sampling error was $\pm 4.9\%$ points with 95% confidence and $\pm 3.5\%$ points with 95% confidence, respectively. The process of each poll was face-to-face interview by household visit using structured questionnaire and the 40% of retrieved questionnaires of each interviewer was validated by telephone. The respondents were selected by quota and stratified random sampling from the population of age 20~64 and local inhabitants around nuclear power plants.

The survey results of poll on information disclosure are as follows:

Firstly, the dominant main information source was same as first poll. The 82.5% of inhabitants around nuclear plant pointed out TV as a main source for nuclear information. Family, friends or acquaintances (39.3%), newspaper (37.3%) followed TV.

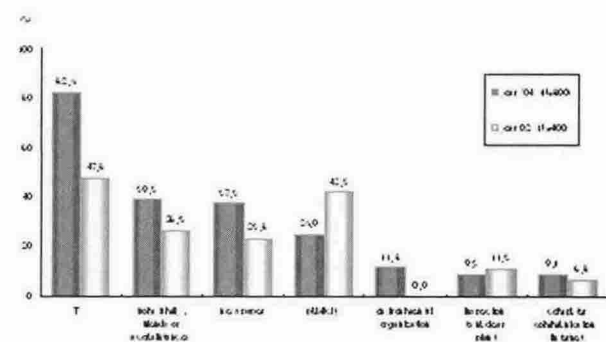


Figure 1. Main information sources of nuclear power plant.

Secondly, the openness of nuclear plant information to inhabitant lowered about 10% point. Among inhabitants around nuclear plant, those who are aware of the act of public information disclosure to nuclear plant information are only 22.3%. Especially the evaluation results of five categories on safety information openness (e.g., transparency, details, speediness, accuracy, understandability) were very low of 10% and needed to be improved. The easiness and details of information of environmental group contributed to its high credibility organization.

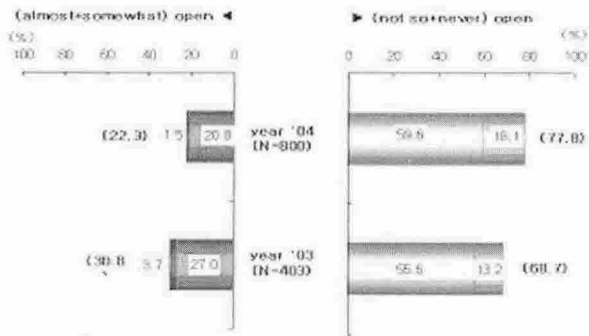


Figure 2. Openness of nuclear plant information to inhabitants.

Thirdly, Information to be provided preferentially: half of inhabitants around nuclear plant, 50.9%, answer that 'management of radioactive waste' should be provided preferentially.

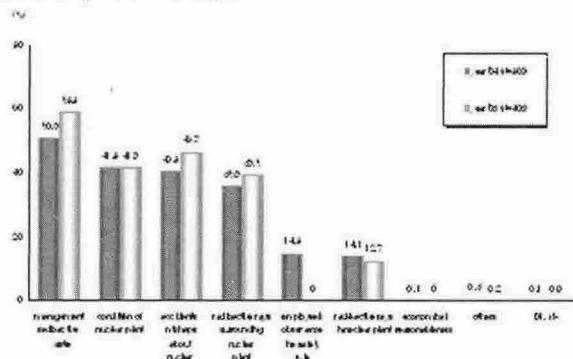


Figure 3. Information to be provided preferentially.

2.3 Lessons Learned from the Public Survey

Firstly, the information on nuclear safety should not be distorted. If nuclear safety information by the third party prevails among the public, the distortion of information inevitably occurs and information from the official organization will be excluded from the public.

Secondly, the transparency of information on the nuclear safety is very important factor. It is because deterioration of reliability due to even one instance of concealment can undermine the confidence established for a long period.

Thirdly, an attitude that opens information actively to the public is necessary. Delay of information, which is provided passively according to the act of information disclosure, is not permitted owing to the development of the internet and, moreover, real-time information disclosure is often required.

Finally, the contents and type of information, which reflect the demands from information audience should be always considered. Information which the public want to know should be provided as well as one willingly offered and thoughtful consideration is required to enhance the understanding of information audience.

3. Conclusion

Now we have to think about the question: How sufficient is sufficient enough in information openness? It is a hot potato of information disclosure on nuclear safety. The loud voice of the public need more information on nuclear safety and we, the engaged in nuclear industry have to respond to it effectively. The electric utility has first and foremost responsibility for this topic. However, the Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety (KINS) as a part of nuclear regulatory organization has to share the responsibility. KINS established the Nuclear Safety Information Center (NSIC) last year and tried to enhance the accessibility to nuclear safety information of the public. The operation of NSIC goes through the test tunnel of lessons learned from the public survey. As a beginning stage, the operation of NSIC has some weakness, but the acceptance of local inhabitants is friendly. The possibility of a friendly organization will depend upon the continual and consistent efforts to meet the needs and to listen to the voice of information audience.

REFERENCES

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